

Step By Step: School For Autistic Children

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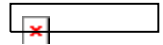
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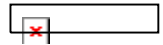
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Introduction and summary

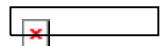


Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

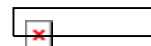


Step by Step: School for Autistic Children is an independent day special school which provides education for pupils who have needs on the autistic spectrum. The school occupies a large converted barn and is located approximately three miles from East Grinstead, in Sussex. The school was founded by a group of parents and opened in April 2004. A board of governors takes responsibility for the school whilst ownership rests with a charity: 'Step by Step: School for Autistic Children Ltd'.

The school is registered with the Department for Education and Skills for up to 30 pupils aged between 4 and 16 years. To date, the school has established provision for primary-aged pupils. Currently four boys and one girl attend. All pupils have a statement of special educational need (SEN) and their places are privately funded.

The school aims to provide a broad curriculum, which enables pupils to achieve their full potential for learning, communication and independence. Structured individual programmes are used to teach new skills and knowledge in small steps. A tutor is assigned to work closely with each pupil and help them achieve their individual targets.

Summary of main findings

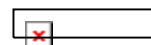


Step by Step: School for Autistic Children provides a safe, caring and purposeful environment in which pupils are stimulated to learn. Pupils make good progress with their academic learning and in developing their social and communication skills. Teaching is good and is provided by a knowledgeable and committed staff team. Pictures, signing and specific language are used consistently and effectively to help pupils communicate. Staff know pupils well and are sensitive to their individual needs. There are very good systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress and information is used effectively to inform planning.

The school achieves its aim to provide a broad curriculum except that the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum and planning for sensory activities are under-developed.

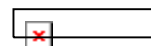
The school has been very successful in establishing a high standard of provision in the short period of time since its foundation.

What the school does well



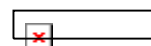
- o teaching is good and ensures that pupils make good progress in their academic learning and in developing their social and communication skills;
- o pupils behave very well and display positive attitudes to school;
- o very good provision for developing pupils' spiritual, moral and social education encourages them to explore their emotions and become increasingly aware of their relationship with others;
- o very good assessment systems are used to measure pupils' achievements and to identify the next steps in their learning;
- o a very high standard of care and welfare is provided; staff have a good relationship with pupils and treat them with respect; and
- o parents are provided with very good information about the school and their children's progress.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



The school meets all the regulations.

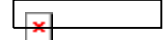
What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002



In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

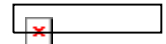
Next steps



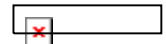
Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- further develop the ICT curriculum; and
- improve planning for the sensory curriculum.

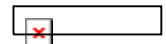
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



The school is successful in achieving its aim to provide a broad curriculum which addresses the specific communication difficulties of pupils with needs on the autistic spectrum.

The school adopts a distinctive approach based on the principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). Tasks are broken into small steps and taught through carefully structured individual programmes. A tutor is assigned to work closely with each pupil. Signed support, pictures and specific language are used to aid communication and pupils receive regular praise or small rewards in recognition of their achievements. Pupils rotate between working on their personal targets at their individual study desks and joining the larger group to learn social skills.

All National Curriculum subjects and religious education (RE) are taught. Science, art and design and technology are taught in groups and equipment is brought out as needed. The kitchen is used occasionally to prepare snacks and support the teaching of independent living skills. Physical education (PE) is provided on an area covered with large mats. Increasing pupils' confidence in exploring the physical environment is seen as an important aspect of the school's work. The services of an occupational therapist have recently been engaged to assess all pupils and give advice to staff. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship programmes cover appropriate topics including personal hygiene, keeping warm, healthy eating and social behaviour. A part-time specialist provides an additional music session each week.

There is an appropriate focus on developing pupils' communication skills. A visiting speech and language therapist assesses pupils and designs programmes for staff to use in daily communication groups.

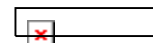
The school provides sufficient taught time during the week for all subjects to receive adequate coverage. There is a good balance between individual and group work, which maintains variety in the school day. The curriculum satisfies the requirements of pupils' statements of SEN.

Curriculum leadership is good and ensures that the school's behavioural approach informs all areas of the curriculum. The school is adapting curriculum materials based on half-termly topics which are referenced to the National Curriculum. These materials have been specifically designed for use with pupils who have severe learning difficulties and are generally appropriate. In some subjects, planning contains insufficient reference to sensory experience to support pupils' learning. Curriculum statements and schemes of work are in place for all subjects except ICT, which is identified for development in the school's plans.

The school has developed a curriculum well-matched to the needs of primary-aged pupils. Where pupils attend part-time, there is good communication with the home or link mainstream school to ensure a balanced curriculum is provided.

Pupils go on a number of trips and visits to support their learning within the curriculum. There is very good sharing of information between the school and home which enables parents to support the learning priorities for their child.

The quality of the teaching and assessment



Teaching and learning are good. In over half of the lessons seen teaching was good or better and in all others it was at least satisfactory. Staff work well as a team and share high expectations for pupils' achievement.

Group lessons and individual activities are well planned. There is a clear focus on what pupils are expected to learn and their achievements are continually recognised. Tasks are carefully matched to pupils' individual abilities. The teacher and tutors use agreed strategies consistently to help pupils communicate. A pictorial timetable is used to reinforce pupils' understanding of the order of lessons in the school day. Signed support and pictures are used to aid communication generally. Staff use humour, praise and rewards effectively to encourage pupils to complete their work. When pupils begin to lose concentration, staff are resourceful in changing the focus of the activity or providing a short break before work is resumed. These strategies are successful in helping pupils stay on task for increasingly longer periods of time. In a small number of lessons, pupils lose concentration because there are insufficient sensory learning opportunities.

Staff manage pupils' behaviour in a calm and non-confrontational manner. They recognise that pupils' non-compliance with a request may be linked to their communication difficulty. Staff make requests using suitable language, for example, saying 'my turn' when requesting that a pupil gives back an object. The tactful and sensitive approach of staff results in pupils behaving very well and displaying positive attitudes to school.

The school provides good training for new staff which ensures they understand the principles of ABA. The teacher and tutors demonstrate good knowledge of the approach and apply it consistently. Staff possess appropriate knowledge of the subjects taught and have been creative in adapting the curriculum to meet pupils' specific needs.

Resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are good resources to aid pupils' communication. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is supported by a good range of large books, puzzles and displays. Resources for teaching music are good and construction kits are used to support science. PE resources are good and include benches, balance boards and large balls. There is a limited range of artefacts to support the teaching of history, geography and RE.

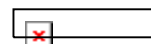
Specialised equipment to support ICT is not yet in use, although the school has recently ordered switches, a touch screen and adapted key boards which are appropriate for pupils' needs.

Assessment is used very well to measure pupils' progress and to set targets for improvement. Daily records are kept which measure pupils' progress against their individual education targets. This information is used in tutors' planning and ensures that pupils are set tasks which are sufficiently challenging. Fortnightly reports record pupils' progress against P levels and their targets and a half-termly ABA checklist measures pupils' progress in communication. Attractively presented portfolios contain photographic evidence of specific skills pupils have learned. Records show that pupils are making good progress with their academic learning and in developing their social and communication skills.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral and social development very effectively and makes good provision for their cultural development.

Pupils' spiritual development is supported through 'thinking time' at the end of each day. Pupils gather in a circle and explore their senses through smelling flowers or feeling the texture of different fabrics. A special atmosphere is created by lighting a candle and playing soft music.

Pupils' self-esteem is enhanced through music and PE. They explore their feelings and become more confident with their environment. In sensory sessions staff gently massage pupils' hands and feet helping them to relax and reflect. Pupils receive praise for achieving their individual communication targets. Staff explain in clear language why they have been successful, for example, staff will say 'good sitting' or 'good speaking', which increases pupils' self-awareness. The continual recognition of pupils' achievements boosts their self-esteem and emotional well-being.

There is a positive ethos in the school which is very effective in supporting pupils' moral education. Staff set a good example and always treat pupils with consideration and respect. Positive behaviour, such as sharing or helping, is highlighted and praised.

Developing pupils' social skills forms a central part of the school's curriculum. Pupils engage in several group activities each day, which are carefully structured to ensure success in nurturing their social skills and positive relationships. Pupils learn to take turns and listen to the contribution of others. They eat together at lunch and snack time and display appropriate manners. Staff encourage pupils to take responsibility and develop their independence. Examples of this occur when pupils collect the post, take the register and put equipment away at the end of music and PE lessons. Pupils are also encouraged to make choices, for example in a PE lesson when they choose an activity to demonstrate to the rest of the class.

Staff demonstrate a close understanding of each pupil's particular needs, which is evident in pupils' behaviour management plans. They respond to the respect shown by adults and behave very well. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe in the caring environment.

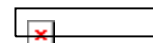
Pupils learn about the wider community through the developing citizenship curriculum. Visits to the local shops, library, park and a farm are used to increase pupils' knowledge of their local environment.

Religious festivals are celebrated during 'thinking time' and attractive displays, currently on the Chinese New Year and Eid, are used to reinforce pupils' understanding. The study of different cultures is addressed through the half-termly topics, which include 'food' and 'celebrations'.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



The school provides very successfully for pupils' welfare, health and safety. It offers a caring environment which is sensitive to the particular needs of pupils with needs on the autistic spectrum.

All appropriate policies are in place which include child protection, health and safety and anti-bullying. Records of incidents and accidents are kept and monitored by the headteacher.

The school has a behaviour policy which promotes good behaviour and informs the way staff relate to pupils. Pupils' behaviour is viewed in relation to their communication needs and addressed through their curriculum targets. All staff receive training in the positive and non-confrontational management of pupils' behaviour. A caring and respectful approach is maintained by all staff in their work with pupils. This positive aspect of the school's work is recognised by parents in their response to the questionnaire circulated prior to the inspection.

A member of staff is trained in fire safety procedures and emergency drills are carried out regularly. Safety equipment is inspected and serviced by an authorised contractor. The local fire authority has visited the school and approved arrangements. The school has a medical room and two staff are trained in First Aid. The school maintains a daily attendance register and keeps an admission register which contains all the required information.

There is very good individual supervision of pupils on site. Thorough risk assessments are conducted before taking pupils on trips and visits away from school which have due regard for their safety. The school is accessible to wheelchair users and has a disabled toilet. However it has not yet drawn up an accessibility plan to meet the requirements of the DDA.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

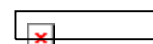
Yes.

What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

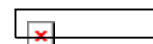


Bureau. The school keeps records to show that staff qualifications and identity are checked and that suitable references are received prior to employment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The standard of premises and accommodation is good. The school occupies a former barn which has been converted imaginatively to offer an attractive environment for learning. The premises are well maintained and there is a high standard of hygiene and cleanliness.

One large teaching room is divided into three areas. There is an area with desks for individual learning, a second space provides tables for group work and a cushioned area is used for relaxation, PE and music. Separate rooms lead off the main area to provide a medical room, office, kitchen and toilets. There are no specialist rooms for teaching practical subjects.

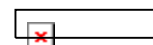
The accommodation is spacious and of generous size for the number and age of pupils currently attending. The school has been purposely decorated to provide a visually neutral background to help pupils remain calm. The attractive displays and organisation of space support effectively the school's highly structured approach to teaching communication.

There are good facilities for outdoor play. A climbing frame, slide and swing have been installed on a small grassed area. Additional equipment is brought out at break and lunch time, such as small pedal bikes, cones, hoops and balls.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



The school provides very good information for parents and other interested partners.

The school prospectus sets out the school's aims, ethos, admission arrangements and provision for pupils' welfare. It also describes the school's distinctive approach to teaching pupils with needs on the autistic spectrum. Parents are informed that they will receive on request the complaints procedure and copies of policies on health and safety, promoting good behaviour and child protection.

The school has also created a web site which gives further information on the organisation and history of the school.

Parents receive very good information regarding their children's progress. Information is shared daily through the home-school books and fortnightly through 'progress folders'. The high quality of information enables the school and parents to share priorities for development and work together

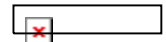
effectively to help pupils improve.

The school provides annual reports to parents which give detailed information on pupils' academic and social progress. Local authorities receive appropriate information on the review of pupils' statements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints



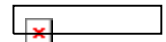
The school has a clear complaints policy which sets out how parents may make formal and informal complaints to the school and how details are recorded. The school records and monitors details of any complaints in the appropriate manner.

In response to the parental questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection, all parents agree that they understand the school's procedure for handling complaints.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

School details



Name of school:	Step by Step: School for Autistic Children		
DfES ref number:	845/6054		
Type of school:	Special		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	4 - 16 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 1,	Girls 0,	Total 1
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys 3,	Girls 1,	Total 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys 4,	Girls 1,	Total 5
Annual fees (day pupils):	£34,000		
Address of school:	Neylands Farm Grinstead Lane Sharpthorne East Sussex RH19 4HP		
E-mail address:	www.stepbystepschool.org.uk		
Telephone number:	01342 811852		
Fax number:	01342 811853		
Headteacher:	Ms Jane Reed		
Proprietor:	Step by Step: School for Autistic Children Ltd		
Chair of the governing body:	Mrs Susan James		

Lead Inspector:
Dates of inspection:

Mr Andrew Redpath
7 - 10 March 2005

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